

INFLUENCE OF THE PSALMS.

It is a well-known rabbinical tradition that above the bed of David there hung a harp. At midnight, as the wind rippled over the strings, it made such music that the poet king was constrained to rise, and, till the pillar of dawn rose high in the eastern heavens, to wed words to the strains. The poetry of that tradition is summed up in the saying that the Book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man swept by the hand of his Maker. In it are gathered the lyrical burst of his tenderness, the moan of his penitence, the pathetic accent of his sorrow, the triumphant shout of his victory, the despairing sob of his defeat, the firm tone of his confidence, the rapturous note of his assured hope. In it is presented the anatomy of all parts of the human soul; in it, as Heine says, are collected "sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfilment—the whole drama of humanity."

In the Psalms is painted, for all time, in fresh, unfading colors, the picture of the moral welfare of man, often baffled yet never wholly defeated, struggling upward to all that is best and highest in his nature; always aware how short of the aim falls the practice, how great is the abyss that severs the aspiration from the achievement. In them we do not find the innocent converse of man with God in the Garden of Eden; if we did, the book would for our fallen natures lose its value. On the contrary, it is the revelation of a soul deeply conscious of sin, seeking, in broken accents of shame and penitence and hope, to renew personal communication with God, heart to heart, thought to thought, and face to face. It is this which gives to the Psalms their eternal truth. It is this which makes them at once the breviary and the viaticum of humanity. Here are gathered not only pregnant statements of the principles of religion and condensed maxims of spiritual life, but a promptuary of manly effort, a summary of devotion, a manual of prayer and praise—and all this is clothed in language which is as rich in poetic beauty as it is universal and enduring in poetic verity.

The Psalms, then, are a mirror in which each man may see the motion of his own soul. They express in exquisite words the affinity which every thoughtful human heart craves to find with a supreme, unchanging, loving God who will be to him a protector, guardian, and friend. They utter the ordinary familiar experiences, thoughts, and feelings of men; but they give to these a width of range, an intensity, a depth, and an elevation which transcend the capacity of the most gifted. They translate into speech the spiritual passion of the loftiest genius; they also utter with the beauty born of truth and simplicity, and with exact agreement between the feeling and the expression, the inarticulate and humble longings of the unlettered peasant. So it is that in every country the language of the Psalms has become part of the daily life of nations, passing into their proverbs, mingling with their conversation, and used at every critical stage of existence—at baptism and marriage, in sickness and death. To weary travellers, of every condition and at every period of history, they have been rivers of refreshment and wells of consolation. In them the spirit of controversy and the strife of creeds are forgotten. Over the parched and heated fields of theological polemics the breath of the Psalms sweeps, cool and soft and balmy. For centuries the supplications of Christians clothed in the language of the Psalter, have risen like incense to the altar-throne of God; in them are expressed, from age to age, the devotion and the theology of religious communions that in all else were at deadly feud. Surviving all the changes in Church and State, in modes of thought, habits of life, and form of expression, the Psalms, as devotional exercises, have sunk into our hearts; as sublime poetry, they have fired our imaginations; as illustrations of human life, they have arrested our minds and stored our memories.

In the Psalms the vast hosts of suffering humanity have found, from the time of Jonah to the present day, the deepest and the most faithful expression of their hopes and fears. By them the anguish wrung from tortured lips on the cross, at the stake, and on the scaffold has been healed and solaced. Strong in the strength that they impart, young boys and tender girls have risen from their knees in the breathless amphitheatre, thronged with its quivering multitudes, and boldly faced

the lions. With them upon their tongues myriads have died—now in quiet sick rooms, surrounded by all who have loved them best in life; now alone and far from home and kindred; now hemmed in by fierce enemies howling for their blood. For centuries, in the storm and stress of life, the eternal questions of whence? and why? and whither? roll in upon us with monotonous iteration, like the sullen surges of the inarticulate sea. With strained nerves and senses keenly alert, men and women have asked what is life and what is death, and the only answer to their questions has been the echo of their own voices reverberating through a cavernous void, until, in weariness and despair, they turned to the Psalter, and its words have wrapped them round like a folding sense which has brought them imperishable peace. Thus, in the Psalms there are pages which are stained with the life-blood of martyrs and bedewed with the tears of saints; others which are illuminated by the victories of weak humanity over suffering and fear and temptation; others which glow with the brightness of heroic constancy and almost superhuman courage. Over the familiar words are written, as it were in a palimpsest, the heart-stirring romances of spiritual chivalry, the most moving tragedies of human life and action.—*The Quarterly Review*.

ANNIVERSARIES OF THE HEART.

Beside the anniversaries which we keep among our friends and at the fireside, most of us have other days sacredly set apart which, it may be, only God knows of, and of which we do not often speak. A little mark in our every-day book, a pencilled line under a text, a furrow in the earth where a bed has been made for all that was mortal of one of God's saints, a date which means for us more than for others, and the whole past awakens, the present drops away, we are back again in the sweet fields of youth. A waft of perfume, a strain of music, a chance word in conversation, have power to revive a whole sheaf of memories at any time, but our special personal anniversaries do not require these reminders. Always for some of us there is a month, and a day of the month and an hour in the day when life is sadder colored than its usual wont, when we have need to lay hold on strength that is greater than ours, and when, indeed, we enter into our closets, and shut our doors, and pray to our Father who seeth in secret.

Few lives there are which, having been extended beyond youth, have not known the moulding touches of pain. In God's economy pain comes as the gracious refiner, so that the noblest and most lofty souls we know seem to have had most of its discipline. Pain accepted as God's gift, pain looked upon as God's angel, in the last analysis brings out all that is best and most abiding in character. Only when we fret at pain and gird at it, quarrel with it and resist it in fierce rebellion does it produce bitterness and sharpness rather than sweetness and strength.

Of these heart anniversaries the larger part have to do with gloom and sorrow of some sort. There was one, dear as our own lives, but the time had not come for the love to be told to the world, and even our own world of home knew nothing, suspected nothing. To friends and acquaintances the attentions seemed mere common-places, and no deeper sentiment was so much as thought of, so that when death came suddenly there was no knowledge that one was taken and the other left—the other left, not to the royal purple of widowhood, but to the sober grey of a life out of which color and flavor had gone, but which must be quietly borne alone. There are such bereavements, and their anniversaries are kept all the way on till old age comes and death reunites.

Some of us must number among our heart anniversaries the mistakes of judgment into which we were once impulsively led, and which, so far as we were concerned, had results impossible to foresee and were stepping-stones to inevitable disaster. "If I could only put myself back where I stood one summer day, ten, twenty years ago, at the parting of the ways, how thankful I would be, and how differently I would act." But about such an anniversary it is better to heap violets of tender penitence than to wreath it with the bitter rue. After all, we probably acted as we then thought best, and with what light we had, and as our